

BuzzFeed, Inc. has this series on its Youtube channel where two people get handcuffed together for a period of 24 hours. The two participants (read: victims) must figure out how best to accomplish tasks ranging from eating to doing their jobs. The viewers especially lap up the videos where polar opposites get cuffed together.

Having depression is similar to being in one of these videos. The only difference is that that you didn't consent to being tossed into a handcuff video of your own. Oh, and that there are no outs of the handcuffs for "safety reasons" as the BuzzFeed video participants are allowed.

Most of the Buzzfeed participants report a new sense of appreciation or a deeper understanding of their assigned partner. Through communication and occasional coercion, both parties always are able to figure out a midground for coexistence.

This is not always the case with Depression. Imagine being chained to an impressively impulsive, reckless, and mercurial person. It takes up all of your energy shouting at this person to just *calm down for Christ's sake I need to talk to you for just a sec*, all the while being dragged around like an owner desperately gripping onto the leash of a dog that hasn't seen the light of day in a while. It doesn't work, and when you think you have a down period to get through to them, you look down and find them asleep.

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You should remember that Depression, unlike the partner you could be handcuffed to, feeds off of and is shaped by how you interact with them. Dangle enough blackmailing material in front of

the partner, and you can be sure that they'll snatch it up and hang the threat of using the information in front of you in turn. Or they might outright use it then and there, but at least they're predictable. A partner is a person. Depression, in contrast, is not. It is the farthest thing from being a person and dehumanizes whoever it sets its sights on. Maybe you notice that some of Depression's behaviors are starting to rub off on you, maybe you notice that you've become a little dehumanized. You have to decide how you want to handle it:

- a. Pick out earplugs with the highest noise reduction rating on the market. Jam them so far into your ears that the only thing you can feel is the blood pulsing in your ears. (The downside to this method is that you block out your other feelings too)
- b. Take a few moments to examine yourself at the moment -- how deeply is Depression affecting you right now? To what extent has its tendencies latched on to you? How much has changed without you noticing? Do you have a plan or any idea at all for how you're going to deal with Depression? If not, go back to a); otherwise, continue to
- c. Remind yourself of two things:
 1. If your plan is to just try to ignore Depression in the meantime, be aware that it will find ways to capture your attention again. It's very good at exploiting each inch of the leash you give it. If left unattended, it will always come back to obstruct your life in some form or another, no matter how hard you try. Think you should go talk to friends or do something you like? Sorry, Depression's hidden the motivation to do those somewhere in plain sight. It's not gonna tell you where though, and you won't be able to gain your drive back until you acknowledge Depression.

2. Don't feel ashamed if you don't have a "legitimate" excuse to rattle off in a script when someone looks at you weirdly for being handcuffed to Depression. This doesn't have to be some dirty little secret. When you're ready, let the people in your life know what's going on. You don't have to share everything, but you might be surprised by how others deal with being cuffed to not only Depression but other unwanted partners as well.
- d. Decide (or realize) that you can't control Depression and it's just gonna be how it is. Maybe, you can filter it out. FORTIFY YOUR DEFENSES, IF YOU WILL but remember to keep a drawbridge. Some ideas for how to do this:
1. Find passive-noise cancellation earphones;
 2. work around it. Answer to it when necessary but otherwise don't engage;
 3. take a deep breath and cuff your ankles together. If it forced you to be with it, it's gonna have to learn to cope with you.

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But here's the thing. The partner, Depression, has a power: they teach you how to deal with another person. In the partner's case, you learn to cohabitate with another being. In Depression's case, you learn to cohabitate with a new version of yourself. In a sense, you're nurturing a new you, and without you doing that, you would run amok and harm others. Depression teaches you patience. And resilience. And God knows you need that in today's fast-paced world.

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Is depression truly blocking you, or are you letting it block you?

For this assignment, I learned about a form of creative writing that I had not known about before: lyrical essays. I emulated Heidi Czerwiec's writing style in "Consider the Lobster Mushroom" for my lyrical essay. In "Consider the Lobster Mushroom," Czerwiec communicates with the readers through comparison, formatting structure, and informal language.

The overarching theme of the author's lyrical essay is the comparison of two entities. Czerwiec cleverly draws a parallel between lobster mushrooms and creative nonfiction, describing the two as having the quality of "symbiosis of fact infecting art" (69). In my own lyrical essay, I chose to compare the experience of being voluntarily handcuffed to another person to discovering that you have depression. While I do state that both options may result in finding a "midground for coexistence," my essay focuses more on the differences between the two options. The author again draws a direct link between lobster mushrooms and creative nonfiction in the second to last section of the essay by stating that both have a "super power [that makes] matter that is otherwise inedible...[p]alatable" (71). With this phrase, Czerwiec reminds readers that out of frustrating experiences and possibly unsalvageable foods/matter that good can be found. The power I chose for being handcuffed to a partner and depression is that "they teach you how to deal with another person." Though neither experience is particularly positive in concept, an advantage can be drawn out of them.

Czerwiec does not follow a standard expository essay format. She divides the essay into four subsections, each one of varying lengths. The first section is her introduction, where the reader becomes familiar with the similarities between lobster mushrooms and creative nonfiction; the introduction is written in four standard paragraphs. Likewise, in my essay, my introduction briefly explains the connection between being handcuffed to a partner and having

depression. In the second section, the author writes using a list format to suggest to the reader how they might contend with any conflict encountered with a lobster mushroom. Although the content of the lists is entirely about lobster mushrooms, it is clear that Czerwiec also writes about overcoming writer's block for creative nonfiction. This is shown through phrases such as "if you can't deal with the mushroom now, it will come back. It will always come back, popping up whether you want it to or not" (70). In my essay, I try to establish that I am referencing being handcuffed to a partner while writing about depression through the phrase: "Decide (or realize) that you can't control Depression and it's just gonna be how it is. Maybe, you can filter it out." This sentence could refer purely to depression, or it could be taken to mean withstanding a difficult partner.

By using informal language in the lyrical essay, Czerwiec achieves the effect of making her readers feel as if they are her old friends catching up and sharing advice. For example, the sentences "Decide you have worked too hard for this mushroom. It is too valuable to let go. THIS IS YOUR FUCKING MUSHROOM" have a humorous undertone (71). Similar wording throughout the essay allows the author to maintain a lighthearted dialogue with the readers. I tried to mimic this effect by intentionally choosing a modern, widespread news source (Buzzfeed) as one of my two entities. I tried to be humorous through short sentences, such as this combination in my second to last section: "Depression teaches you patience. And resilience. And God knows you need that in today's fast-paced world."

Through the use of two uncommonly paired subjects, list structure and vernacular, I emulated Heidi Czerwiec's lyrical essay, "Consider the Lobster Mushroom," in my own.